

FOIAb3b

MOROCCAN ENVOYS DESPATCHED TO EXPLAIN BEN BARKA AFFAIR

Kidnap Investigations Continue

COPYRIGHT

RABAT -- As the investigations into the kidnapping last October in Paris of Moroccan opposition leader, M. Mehdi Ben Barka, continued this week, high-ranking emissaries of King Hassan II were visiting various countries in eastern and western Europe, the Arab world and north Africa explaining Morocco's point of view in the mystery. Eight officials, armed with messages for the leaders of the respective countries they were to visit, left here on January 28.

Meanwhile on February 2 in Paris a gunman shot dead a French detective officer during a police swoop for a suspect wanted in connection with the kidnap mystery.

The gunman, who was on the police wanted list for other crimes, killed Police Superintendent, Maurice Galibert, and wounded two other officers in a bar near the Arc de Triomphe, before escaping. Police had gone to the bar after being tipped off that underworld figure Julian Le Ny was there. Le Ny is allegedly implicated in the kidnapping which happened on October 29. The gunman was not identified by the police.

The investigations into the case have become prolonged and during the inquiries Rabat officials feel the most serious aspect of the case is that French police officials appear to have been involved. They stoutly deny French allegations that Morocco's Interior Minister, Brigadier-General Mohammed Oufkir, had anything to do with the affair.

Relations between Morocco and France have been seriously rocked by the business but both Moroccan and French officials here say relations are not expected to worsen.

Appeal To Journalists

One of King Hassan's emissaries, Foreign Minister M. Ahmed Taibi Benhima, told a press conference in Cairo on January 31 that Morocco would not hand over General Oufkir to the French authorities. He said this move would be "self-incriminating."

He told reporters that if the Rabat Government bowed down to the French demand -- the authorities in Paris recently issued an international arrest warrant for the Moroccan minister -- "This would be tantamount to admitting implication in the case."

He called on the French Government to let Morocco have its files on the case. "Only then", he said, "are we prepared to take up responsibility."

The minister appealed to journalists to refrain from personal emotions and added: "I am not an enemy in front of you, but I came willing to inform you and try to clarify any doubts in your minds." His mission itinerary also included Ethiopia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.

He told one questioner that if he (the questioner) had any proof that the United States Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) was involved in the case, then both France and Morocco would be glad to be shown it.

On February 1 in Paris, French security police (Surete Nationale) denied that French investigators were at work in Cairo on the Ben Barka affair. "No official of the service has been instructed to conduct an investigation in the U.A.R. capital", the police said.

King Hassan was urged by the National Union of Moroccan Students in Syria to hand over his interior minister and two top security men to France for interrogation in a cable to the King published in Damascus on January 30.

The Cairo weekly publication Akhbar EL-Yom reported on January 29 that the gang which kidnapped Ben Barka had plotted to blow up his house in Cairo last September. It said that Ben Barka's wife who is living in Cairo, told Akhbar EL-Yom her husband knew about the plot and cabled her from Geneva to reside elsewhere.

Both official organs of Tunisia's ruling Socialist Destour Party broke editorial silence on January 29 on the Ben Barka affair and called on both sides to throw full light on the case. The Arab language Al-Amal and the French language L'Action published editorials on January 29 on the eve of the arrival in Tunis of Abdel-Hadi Boutaleb, the Moroccan Justice Minister, who has been charged by King Hassan to explain Morocco's attitude in the affair.

So far, the Tunisian press, both official and privately owned, has given front-page coverage to the Ben Barka case but has maintained a careful balance between French and Moroccan sources and refrained from comment.

Al-Amal said the Ben Barka affair had now taken on the proportions of a scandal implicating state police services and even high-ranking personalities in two friendly states.

The editorial pointed out that France, through President Charles De Gaulle, had "shown her desire to get to the bottom of the affair, whatever the consequences to the functioning of her police services."

"This attitude is even more praiseworthy in that for the first time, France wants to dissociate the state's prestige from the misdeeds caused by the bad operation of certain of its institutions."

The editorial went on: "His majesty the King of Morocco has also clearly called for the truth in this shadowy affair...."

A Question Of Conscience

L'Action praised both General De Gaulle's and King Hassan's calls for truth and justice in the affair.

The editorial went on "Tunisia adds her voice to those of all men of goodwill who want full light to be thrown with diligence and severity on the affair."

The newspaper added that the truth should eventually be made public "without any make-believe."

Beirut's Al-Amal said: "The Ben Barka case is above all a question of conscience and should be regarded only as such. Morocco and France are entitled to discuss their rights in this respect."

Al-Diar charged in an editorial that "Zionism" had tried to benefit from the Ben Barka case to trouble relations between France and Arab countries. The editorial said France was "the springboard of Zionist action."

In Prague on January 29 the newspaper Mlada Fronta said that "the murder of Ben Barka was not in keeping with the policy applied by General De Gaulle lately with respect to the so-called third world and its more progressive trends."

The Tunisian weekly Jeune Afrique published in Paris said on January 30 the French authorities had still to back up their allegations that General Oufkir was responsible for the abduction of Ben Barka.

The weekly suggested that French delay in providing proof of General Oufkir's role in the affair might stem from further complications and serve to cover "a political operation which does not concern France and Morocco alone."